

Rose Rassebo #55
February 27, 1985

Q: Mrs. Rassebo, where were you living on December 7th?

A: Well, on Alexander Street coming on up to Wilder Avenue, near the Sacred Heart Church and the little elementary Catholic school that my boy would go to.

Q: Were you working then?

A: No, I was a housewife with an 11 month old child and a 6 year old boy.

Q: What were you doing on the morning of the attack?

A: Well, surprisingly, we were at church at the children's mass which was at 8:00.

Q: Which church was that?

A: This is the Sacred Heart Church on Wilder Avenue. And before confession, well communion was given, there came an eruption of people dashing to the church saying that any key man or any employee of Pearl Harbor must go done and be there as they're needed. We're being attacked by the Japanese.

So just then as we rushed out, just then we noticed that there were small suicidal planes up above and commotion of that sort and I had but two and a half blocks to walk home. When I got home the children's dad had the radio on saying, telling us to get a hold of some containers, wash them clean, fill them up with water, and have a lot of water on hand, and keep calm, and stay home, not be out in the streets, and not get the car and go traveling here and there, to stay put. And that is what was on the radio all day long until they said that we were under martial law.

Q: As a housewife, I imagine one of your big concerns was taking care of your family under the situation.

A: Well, the first thing was food; that was my first thought. And uh, look into the cupboard it's just the usual stable things that you keep but not knowing what you're going to have and what you're not going to have while you decide that the first opportunity you have you're going to just roam out the stores, you know. And where we are we have the mama-papasan stores that were normally open on Sundays but that Sunday they were closed; and to have enough of everything to work with, soap, besides food, accessories, clothing, washing, what have you.

Q: When was the first time you were able to get out shopping?

A: It was the next day, Monday. I looked around to see how much cash I had and went down about four houses to see my mother then

was living in one of these duplexes, and she had a few dollars on her person so she handed my what she had. And the Monday, next day, why we took my baby's carriage and a neighbor and we rounded the stores for blocks, really walked from 8:30, and we didn't get home until 4:00. We were loaded with what food we could get.

Q: What range? How far a field did you roam?

A: Well, up to Moilili I would say it's about a good mile up to Moilili and clear on down to Pensacola; that's another good mile and coming back, we're in mid- Pawaa Junction as it's called you know. And we found many stores that were very receptive in letting us have what we could find on the shelves. But what disturbed us was that we saw foods going out the back door, bags of rice, cans of canned milk, which I wanted as my 11 month old baby was still on a formula (he was a premature baby) and things going out favorably for their own people, the Japanese. So even with that facing us I think we did very well that one day with my baby and myself shopping as we did, with what money we had.

Q: You lived only a couple of blocks from Punahou School.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember Punahou School being taken over by the Army?

A: By the U.S.E.D. [*U.S. Engineers Department*] yes, and there were quarters, and they had a big dining room, and I believe the building in the back, (what they call the dorm for the girls); that was also taken over too, as well as on Punahou Street going toward town, the Pleasanton Hotel was also taken over by the Army.

Q: Where actually was the Pleasanton Hotel?

A: That's where the Fernhurst is now.

Q: Oh.

A: Exactly, right on the same premises.

Q: And there must have been a lot of coming and going at odd hours.

A: Oh yes. While, I think it was in January... January 4th, was when my baby was a year old. And it was shortly after that, after the black our, he was playing in his crib, and somehow fell over and out of the crib onto one of the metal toys of his brothers (by the way, we had no metal toys while Scott was young but this is one of his brothers), and so falling, he had cut open his ear lobe and a gash on his temple. So I ran down the four houses down the way and got a hold of my mother, and my husband called the ambulance. They came out. I rode in the ambulance (this is black out). My mother had a tag on her car and a light of some sort that they had put on, I guess to show that it was alright for her to be on the road. And we were stopped, oh here

and there, occasionally, you know.

Q: Which hospital were you going to?

A: We went to the Childrens Hospital which is at one time the Kuikini Hospital. What it is today I do not know. But I do know it's still standing for some use anyway. And my doctor was with a medical group and he was just finishing doing some surgery. So they called him to tell him I was coming and he then took care of Scotts ear and his cut on his temple. I even remember him giving him a quarter for being such a nice boy. He didn't cry at all.

Q: Tell me, when they had black outs, what did you have to do to your house?

A: Well, uh, we had these globes that just the very center..all of it was painted black but the very center. So the beam of the light went down; it didn't go out. And then we had black heavy denim to put across our windows and our doorway, you know going into the bathroom, bedroom, living room, whatever. And that's how it was because... and then again they had men who went around and what would you say they would be... like uh...

Q: Wardens?

A: Yes. Absolutely. That's the word they used, yeah. And I was caught one night. I was in the kitchen and I had completely forgotten to put that curtain on the doorway leading to the lanai outside. And he was in the next yard so he came across the fence and boy did I get because they were fining people.

Q: Were you fined?

A: No. It was just a don't you do it again, which I said I certainly wouldn't.

Q: So, it was taken pretty seriously?

A: Oh yes! Oh yes! And of course people would have parties and things would slacken and people would be careless and those were the people that were fined.

Q: What was the food situation like in terms of getting fresh food, say like apples and oranges?

A: Well, at that time it was more than a year before I had an apple or an orange, and if it hadn't been for friends from the commissary or uh... people with such that they could share an apple, an orange or two, it would have been, Lord, three years before I'd have a bite of an apple or an orange. But then, we had to stand in line, que up for foods, and I remember the supermarkets would have a sign that would say, oh... fresh meat on a certain day, certain hour. It wouldn't be all day; just for certain hours, and the lines would be around the block. You know, I mean you were limited, just so much meat to get and so

forth.

Q: Was that rationing?

A: Yes.

Q: How long would you have to wait in line sometimes?

A: Well, a couple of hours and of course we could get all the sugar we could. Well, there was these friends of ours on the mainland that would write to us and say no sugar... you know, just so much sugar and no more. But we could have all the sugar we wanted. But course, it would irk me, I'd go to the small papasan poi shop and then stand in line and here are these ethnic group, Chinese, Japanese, standing in line for their poi. I really wanted it for my little 11 month old baby. I could do without but it was a food substance for him in place of cereal or starch you know, and then just as it got to me I'd be told that there'd be nothing to be had for me. That I would steam up but what can you do.

Q: Did you work at all during the War?

A: No, I stayed home. My husband felt that there was plenty for me to do at home, which was so. And I helped to babysit; not too many but a few, and of course it would be babysitting that they would come and pick up their babies... not being overnight or in different hours. I just wanted to schedule them, because I had things to do myself. And visiting was not too much to be had, and there was a time there that we couldn't use the phone as often as we wanted. But it got so that it was alright after a while.

Q: Did you do any kind of volunteer work?

A: No. I couldn't. There was enough to keep my home. And then we had to go down and get our gas masks, fitted for ourselves, at different central... what did they call those posts? Different areas that you go to you know to get your papers or they submit you with as I say, gas masks, with the little ones.

Q: Were there different places in each neighborhood?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where was the one that was closest to you?

A: This was almost in town. I would say near the Capitol somewhere. I don't know why but I remember going down there.

Q: So you were issued a gas mask?

A: I was. And Dean was also.

Q: Is Dean your son?

A: My son. He was then six. But the little one; I honestly don't remember what the little one had of anything. I honestly don't remember.

Q: Did they ever issue any of the real small children little sort of like what they call 'bunny bags'?

A: It might have been that. You see, I didn't roam around too much. I was one that stayed home quite a bit. I didn't want to go out any more than was necessary and I didn't want to tag the children along.

Q: So they had gas masks even for the sizes to fit a small child; a six year old boy?

A: Some sort of safety I remember. And of course the schools came in on this too you know; the various schools. They had their exercises and what have you, I was told. I was never there but I was told about it.

Q: You mean air raid drills?

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, the situation must have been pretty tense right after the attack.

A: Well, we had a few neighbors down the street, and there was one particularly as I say, that had their upstairs turned into a shrine, a Japanese shrine, and Mrs. Kuniuki(??) would come down the stairs and she'll say, "Bomb by Japan come. Bomb by Japan come." Maybe we would be under the jurisdiction of the Japanese.

Q: So people really didn't know whether there might not actually be a Japanese invasion, did they?

A: No. No. Not at all.

Q: It must have been pretty frightening in a way.

A: It was... not knowing, you know. Then it was much later that they had people leaving that wanted to leave. I believe they had to wait their quota of some sort, and my neighbor left with her six children. And women were told to wear slacks, no dresses while they on board; good reasons why. But the Japanese I knew, they were friendly. They were in doubt what would happen to them too and a lot of them were nice people. They spoke well and they were going to schools. Some of them were teachers. A couple of boys there were lawyers, you know. They were Americans. Their mothers and fathers were born and raised in Japan and came over here but there was nothing wrong with them at all. They really tried to emphasize the fact that they were Americans. Of course the old folks were different. They were so sure that we would be taken over.

Q: Do you remember building any kind of fortifications, or them building any kinds of fortifications or defense works?

A: All around the area, the Palace grounds, and over at Central Union Church, and where ever there was an area large enough, they built these shelters. And then, I remember now, we were told to build shelters for ourselves. And we couldn't; there was a yard big enough but we didn't want anything dug up there. So for the safety of the whole area we then went over to Central Union Church, which is on Punahou and Beretania and that was where we felt that we could get for shelter.

Q: Did they have a shelter there at Central Union?

A: Yeah, around that area. And they even had some at Punahou grounds.

Q: Do you remember any other places in your neighborhood; in the Makiki area there that were taken over by the Army or where the Army established bases and camps?

A: No. No, I don't. As I say, I didn't wander around too much, too far. I stayed around our area as much as I could.

Q: O.K., well, I appreciate your sharing your memories with us.

A: Isn't it funny, two weeks ago, I was with Mrs. Winney(??). (she was here at WW II), Mrs. Winney, Lonnie Berenger(??) and who else now, we got together... and this came up about the situation of how it was you know, and we all agreed that we really didn't know from one day to another the very first week, what was going to happen. What would have happened? What could have happened? What if the...

Q: That's a very interesting what if.

A: You see, now Betty Oliver(??) was living off at Pearl City and he was then Commanding Officer. His ship was coming in when they realized we were being attacked. So according to Allan, they changed their course a bit and made it a round about way to get to Pearl Harbor. I don't know what that means. Where would they go in a round about way but I remember him saying that. And when he came in Betty tried to call me. The line was cut off. The whole area of Pearl City was then moved up to Waimano Home up the mountain side. She was ill in bed and Allan, her son, was helping with her. He was then the same age as my boy. When Allan came in, and then he was told...

Q: This is the father?

A: Yeah, the father, Lt. Allan Oliver. He went up to get her and he came to me. He left her at some place, I don't know where, he maybe then took care of her. Then he came to me with his son, and of course, I had Allan with me for a while. And he

wanted to know whether I was able to have Betty with me. I wasn't fixed for an additional grown up and a sick one at that. So she was put in Leahi Hospital and there she stayed until she was well. And then they came to stay with my mother who had a two bedroom apartment you know, and stayed with her for awhile. Now she's gone but I still contact Allan Oliver and he's over in Hawthorne area, remarried of course. And he is... I'm going on 74, so he is close to 80... spry as everything.

Q: That sort of thing just really shows you how you know, the big events impact peoples daily lives.

A: And it was through them I had my first apple and my first orange.

Q: It must have been pretty welcome.

A: True so. To quarter and eighth an apple... that's going some. Whereas we would have an apple to ourselves, or possibly a half. To quarter and to eighths! Boy I never realized how welcome belly welcome would mean and be edible at the same time, because it would just be bacon. But this was the belly part and it was fatty. It was very little layers of meat in between, but I tell you what, it was bacon to us. So many things that we could... Then of course my cousin who was a chaplain with the Marines. I have not met this side of the Quinns(??) from Iowa. I was a Quinn, and He came over and he came to the house. He knew where we were. He came to the house and here he was with a Marine Corps, all decked out, with a pipe in his mouth. And he says, I'm so and so and so and so and so and so. Well, I don't know who you are. But when he said, "My mom Rose Quinn and you have the same name." Yeah I said, could you be Dr. Ridell's(??) son? He said, "hell yes!" For a priest he used beautiful words... choice words too. So he came with some ?? , and breads, and buns.

Q: Must have seemed like manna from heaven.

A: I'm telling you. He was wonderful. He was also the one... he told us had they taken that picture you know, the young man of the Iwo Jima that was holding the flag. If they had gone down a little bit, they would have got him.

Q: He just missed it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Missed by a few feet.

A: Well, that bunch of Quinn are a little bit too much this macho type. I'm not that way at all. I still see them. They're over at Fullerton and Anaheim, which I'm not in gathering and seeing my relations.

Q: Sounds really interesting to hear you talk about those days.

A: Well, I'm glad to be alive. But I had some wonderful Japanese friends.

Q: Yeah.

A: Iquinio Beboy(??) was made, 10 years ago, he was with the 442nd, he was promoted, I don't know what rank it is. They're over at Anaheim. They have four children. Lovely people.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're very welcome.